

## **WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method for providing assurance that an electronic pseudonym belongs to a member of a particular organization, said method comprising the steps of:
  - registering the organization with an authentication authority;
  - distributing a membership token from the authentication authority to the organization;
  - distributing the membership token to the member;
  - registering the pseudonym with the authentication authority; and
  - associating the pseudonym with the organization using the membership token.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the organization.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of associating the membership with the organization comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by a user on a computer system at the authentication authority; verifying a permission of the user to manage the pseudonym; and receiving the membership token from the user.
5. The method of claim 4, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the organization from a database comprising membership tokens and corresponding organizations.
6. The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of decoding the membership token to determine the identity of the organization to be associated with the pseudonym.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises an expiration date.
8. The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of verifying that the membership token has not expired before performing the step of associating the pseudonym with the organization.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the association of the pseudonym with the organization has an expiration period.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising the steps of notifying the member when the expiration period has passed.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the association of the pseudonym with the organization has an expiration date.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of notifying the member when the expiration date has passed.

13. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of notifying the member prior to the expiration date being reached.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of receiving at the authentication authority a revocation notice from the organization and removing the association of the pseudonym with the organization according to the revocation notice.

15. A method for providing assurance that a document posted to an electronic forum by a user belonging to a particular organization, wherein the user posts the electronic document using a pseudonymous identity, said method comprising the steps of:

- registering the organization with an authentication authority;
- distributing a membership token from the authentication authority to the organization, in response to the step of registering the organization;
- receiving at the authentication authority a communication comprising the membership token and the pseudonymous identity, said communication being sent by the user;
- associating, at the authentication authority, the pseudonymous identity with the organization;

providing the user with a means for electronically signing the document using the pseudonymous identity;

verifying that the document was electronically signed using the pseudonymous identity;

and

providing verification to a reader of the document that the pseudonymous identity is associated with the organization.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.
17. The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the organization.
18. The method of claim 15, wherein the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the organization comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by the user on a computer system at the authentication authority; verifying a permission of the user to manage the pseudonymous identity; and receiving the membership token from the user.
19. The method of claim 18, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the organization from a database comprising membership tokens and corresponding organizations.
20. The method of claim 18, further comprising the step of decoding the membership token to determine the identity of the organization to be associated with the pseudonymous identity.
21. The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises an expiration date.
22. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of verifying that the membership token has not expired before performing the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the organization.

23. The method of claim 15, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization has a pre-determined life-span.

24. The method of claim 23, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity when the pre-determined life-span has been exceeded.

25. The method of claim 15, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization has an expiration date.

26. The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity when the expiration date has passed.

27. The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity prior to the expiration date being reached.

28. The method of claim 15, further comprising the steps of receiving at the authentication authority a revocation notice from the organization and removing the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization according to the revocation notice.

29. A method for electronically receiving anonymous feedback from a plurality of members of a customer feedback group, comprising the steps of:

distributing a membership token associated with the customer feedback group to each of the plurality of members;

receiving at an authentication authority a communication from each of the plurality of members, said communication comprising the member's membership token and a pseudonymous identity for the member;

associating at the authentication authority, each of the plurality of members pseudonymous identities with the customer feedback group;

receiving at least one electronic feedback message having an anonymous author, and

verifying that the anonymous author corresponds to one of the pseudonymous identities associated with the customer feedback group.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.

31. The method of claim 29, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the customer feedback group.

32. A method of authenticating anonymous electronic votes cast by voters eligible to vote in an election, comprising the steps of:

    distributing a voter token from an authentication authority to an election authority;

    receiving at the authentication authority a communication comprising the voter token and an pseudonymous identity, said communication being sent from a voter eligible to vote in the election;

    associating at the authentication authority the pseudonymous identity with the election;

    providing the voter with a means for electronically signing an electronic vote using the pseudonymous identity;

    verifying that the electronic vote was electronically signed using the pseudonymous identity; and

    providing verification to the election authority that the pseudonymous identity is associated with a voter eligible to vote in the election.

33. The method of claim 32, wherein the voter token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.

34. The method of claim 32, wherein the voter token comprises an encoded identifier of the organization.

35. The method of claim 32, wherein the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the election comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by the voter on a computer system at the authentication authority; verifying a permission of the voter to manage the pseudonymous identity; and receiving the voter token from the voter.

36. The method of claim 35, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the election from a database comprising voter tokens and corresponding elections.

37. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step registering the election with the authentication authority, and wherein in the step of distributing the voter token to the election authority is performed in response to the registering step.

38. The method of claim 32, wherein the voter token comprises an expiration date.

39. The method of claim 38, further comprising the step of verifying that the voter token has not expired before performing the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the election.

40. The method of claim 32, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the election has a pre-determined life-span.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein the pre-determined life-span corresponds to an election period.

42. The method of claim 32, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the election is valid for a pre-determined date range.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein the pre-determined date range is an election date.

44. The method of claim 32, further comprising the steps of receiving at the authentication authority a revocation notice from the election and removing the association of the pseudonymous identity with the election according to the revocation notice.

45. A method for facilitating an electronic dating service providing anonymous communications between customers with verification that a particular customer is a member of a claimed class of customer, said method comprising the steps of:

    distributing a membership token associated with a class of customers from the electronic dating service to a member of the class;

    receiving at the electronic dating service a communication comprising the membership token and a pseudonymous identity, said communication being sent from the member of the class;

    associating at the electronic dating service the pseudonymous identity with the class;

    verifying that an anonymous communication was sent by a member of the class, wherein the anonymous communication was sent using the pseudonym.

46. The method of claim 45, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.

47. The method of claim 45, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the class.

48. The method of claim 45, wherein the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the class comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by a user on a computer system at the electronic dating service; verifying a permission of the user to manage the pseudonymous identity; and receiving the membership token from the user.

49. The method of claim 48, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the class from a database comprising membership tokens and corresponding classes.

50. The method of claim 49, further comprising the step of decoding the membership token to determine the identity of the class to be associated with the pseudonymous identity.

51. The method of claim 45, further comprising the step removing the association of the pseudonymous identity with the class.

52. The method of 45, further comprising the steps of providing the customer with a means for electronically signing the anonymous communication using the pseudonymous identity;

verifying that the anonymous communication was electronically signed using the pseudonymous identity; and

providing verification to a reader of the anonymous communication that the pseudonymous identity is associated with the class.

53. An authentication authority for providing assurance that an electronic pseudonym belongs to a member of a particular organization, said authentication authority comprising:

a database of registered organizations;

a database of membership tokens assigned to each registered organization; and

a database of associations between electronic pseudonyms and registered organizations,

wherein the database of associations between electronic pseudonyms and organizations is populated when the authentication authority receives a communication comprising a membership token and an electronic pseudonym.

54. The authentication authority of claim 53, wherein the particular organization comprises a plurality of voters registered by an election authority.

55. The authentication authority of claim 53, wherein the authentication authority further comprises an electronic dating service and wherein the particular organization comprises a plurality of people sharing a common trait.

56. The authentication authority of claim 53, further comprising programming logic for distributing a membership token to an organization when the organization registers with the authentication authority.

57. A system for providing assurance that a document posted to an electronic forum by a user belonging to a particular organization, wherein the user posts the electronic document using a pseudonym, said system comprising:

a computer system comprising a memory and a processor;

a database comprising registered organizations, registered pseudonyms, and membership tokens;

a means for distributing a membership token from the computer system to an organization;

a means for the computer system to receive a communication comprising the membership token and the pseudonym, said communication being sent from the user;

a means for associating the pseudonym with the organization in the database;

a means for electronically signing the document with the pseudonym;

a means for verifying that the document was electronically signed with the pseudonym;

and

a means for providing verification to a reader of the document that the pseudonym is associated with the organization.